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THE TRAIL BACK HOME

—BY—
ROSS FARQUHAR



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Franklin, Ohio

and

Denver, Colo.

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also

DENVER, COLO.
944 S. Logan St.

The Trail Back Home

A Comedy-Drama

By

ROSS FARQUHAR

Author of "Anne of Ann Arbor," "Climbin'
Through," etc.

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PUBLISHED BY

ELDRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT HOUSE

FRANKLIN, OHIO

DENVER, COLO.



CHARACTERS

GEORGE WILLIAMS—the country boy who would go to the city.

MR. WILLIAMS—George's pessimistic father.

MRS. WILLIAMS—just a mother.

JANE WILLIAMS—George's sagacious sister.

HOPE ANDERSON—his sweetheart.

TOM
BOB
JOE

}—His pals.

VIVIAN RINEHART—an authoress—mysterious.

WILLIAM GLASS—a smooth one.

SLIPPERY IKE—a crook.

F. G. BLACK—a salesman of oil stock.

ALONZO—colored hotel clerk, bell boy, etc.

OTIS SPENCER—a miserly money-lender.

SUGGESTIONS

The costumes should be those of present day country folk—plain, but not overdone. Bear in mind that the farmer of today is not a "hick." Alonzo, Glass and Slippery Ike should be dressed rather flashily, while Black is garbed in conventional business clothes. Vivian Rinehart wears her clothes well and looks somewhat the Bohemian.

It is desirable that the young folks be good singers, as the melodies, if sung well, will be a pleasing feature of the play.

If desired, the following doubles, *may* be made: Spencer—Glass; Mr. Williams—Black; Bob—Policeman; and Hope or Jane—Vivian.

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The Trail Back Home

ACT I.

(Living room in the Williams country home. Ordinary furniture and furnishings. Calendars and cheap, colored pictures adorn the walls. Organ or piano at left front of stage. At rise of curtain, George is busy packing a large suitcase with his belongings. Shirts, neckties, underwear, a comfort, etc., are piled on a chair.)

GEORGE—I don't know how in the world I'm ever going to get all this junk into this suitcase. If money wasn't so scarce, I'd have me a reg'lar trunk. Then I could take everything I want—and all that mother wants me to take. But, as it is, I'm going to have to leave something out, that's all there is to it. *(Throws a few things to the floor on one side.)*

(Enter Mr. Williams, door right.)

MR. W.—How you comin', George?

GEORGE—Rotten! I never knew I had so much stuff, and I never realized how small a suitcase is, till I tried to pack my stuff in this one.

MR. W.—*(walking over to George)* George, my boy, I think you're foolish to be leaving the farm, and especially, the way things are in the city, just now. I see by tonight's paper that they have started the soup houses in lots of cities.

GEORGE—Now, dad, you know very well that I never will be satisfied to stay on the farm. I ain't built for a farmer, any more than you are built for a poet. I guess I must take after mother's folks in that respect. She was born and raised in the city, and I guess I must have inherited the hankerin' for it.

MR. W.—Well maybe so. How much money you got, George?

GEORGE—Sixty-eight dollars and a quarter—and then you said you'd take the Jersey heifer off of my hands at forty dollars—so that will give me a hundred and eight dollars. My car fare is \$6.42, so I'll have over a hundred when I land there—and I reckon I won't starve on that; think so?

MR. W.—(*whittling a match into a toothpick*) Looks like you oughtn't to George. But I don't know how I'm going to raise that forty for you unless I take some of the money I been savin' to pay on the mortgage. I'd hoped you could stick around here till that was off of our hands—then the farm would be safe for us.

GEORGE—(*Laying his hand on his father's shoulder*) Never you mind, dad. I'll see that the old mortgage gets lifted, all right. (*Takes Mr. W. by both shoulders and turns him to face him squarely.*) Don't you believe in me?

MR. W.—(*hesitating*) Yes—but—well, son, I guess I'm kind of queer—but the city always scares me silly. Anyhow, I'll get the money and let you have it—even if it is the same as throwin' it to the pigs.

(*Enter Mrs. W., wiping her hands on her apron.*)

MRS. W.—How you gettin' along, sonny?

GEORGE—Not so good, Mom. The blamed suitcase is too little.

MRS. W.—(*Sees comfort on the floor*) Aw, Georgie, can't you get this comfort in. You know it would come in powerful handy this winter—and winter ain't so very far away now.

GEORGE—No, I just can't do it. By the time I get all my wearables in it's liable to bust wide open.

MR. W.—I'll bet a ton of timothy hay that you'll be mighty glad to get back here before three months is up.

GEO.—(*with confidence*) Don't you believe it. Of course I want to come back and see you, and I'll miss all

of you like blazes, but a city life's the life for me. I want to mix with the fellows who are doing things—have a hand in the big things worth while.

MR. W.—(*sarcastically*) Well, be careful they don't do you, the first thing.

MRS. W.—Now, pa, don't go discouragin' the poor boy. He comes by this longing for the city honestly. My folks were city folks—and better folks never lived—and it was hard for me to get used to the farm. (*Lays her hand on Mr. W.'s shoulder.*) But I did manage to do it for you and the children.

MR. W.—(*picking his teeth with the match*) Yes, mother, I know you've had it pretty hard, and it's going to take a long time to pay you back—but maybe we can—some day—maybe. I don't know.

MRS. W.—Now, pa, don't get dramatical. I was—I was just—tellin' you not to be throwing cold water on the boy. George isn't going to the city to get swindled—are you, sonny?

GEORGE—(*smiling and putting his arm around her*) Not on your life, mother. I'm going there for two reasons: First, I can't endure the farm; second, I will be better able to help you folks if I can find work I really like—and—(*determined*) and I'm going to.

(*There is a knock at door C. Mrs. W. opens the door. Enter Hope Anderson.*)

HOPE—Good evening, everybody!

(*All return her greeting, George bashfully.*)

MRS. W. Take off your things, Hope. Are you all alone?

HOPE—Father brought me over. He's on his way to the farm bureau meeting. Is Jane here?

MRS. W.—Yes, she's here. Is she the one you came to see? (*Winks at George.*)

HOPE—(*embarrassed*) Yes—of course—I —ah—I came to see all of you.

MR. W.—Oh, yes, of course you did. We didn't think you came just to see George off, did we mother? Say your pa went in to the farm bureau meeting, Hope? I can't for the life of me see why a farmer wants to waste his time on them things for. They ain't satisfied to farm the way our fathers used to farm—makes me sick. They'll get enough of it some day, though.

(George and Hope exchange glances and George proceeds with his packing.)

(Enter Jane, eating an apple, R.)

JANE—Hello, Hope! Glad you came over. Come on upstairs with me. I want to show you the new catalogue of dresses I got today.

MRS. W.—Now, Jane, Hope didn't come over to look at your old catalogues. She can do that any time; can't you, Hope?

HOPE—I—I suppose so. Yes, we have lots of catalogues at home.

JANE—Oh, sure—I see. *(Smiling mischievously.)* I beg your pardon, Hope.

HOPE—*(walking over to piano)* Have you any new pieces, Jane?

JANE—Oh, yes—I just got this one Saturday. *(She shows a piece of music on the sentimental order.)* Let's try it.

HOPE—All right.

(One of the girls sits at the instrument and plays. Both sing.)

(George stops his packing, looks at girls and wipes his eyes with the back of his hand.)

GEORGE—Sis, please cut that out. I don't like it.

JANE—Why, George Williams! Don't like it? Why you said only yesterday, you thought it was simply swell. *(To Hope)* Ain't boys the limit?

GEORGE—I did like it—yesterday.

JANE—*(teasing)* Oh, I see what's the matter, Georgie boy. It makes him homesick, doesn't it?

GEORGE—Aw, rats! (*Resumes packing.*)

(*Honk of auto heard off stage and Tom, Bob and Joe are heard singing, "Merrily We Roll Along," or some other old song, equally popular with young men. This may be made a pleasing feature if the boys are good singers, or funny if they care to burlesque it.*)

GEORGE—(*going to door C.*) Hi, there! Come on in, fellows.

VOICES—(*outside*) You bet your life we're coming in.

(*Enter Tom, Bob and Joe. They shake hands all around, and toss their hats on the piano and hang their overcoats on the back of a chair.*)

TOM—So you're going for sure, are you, George?

GEORGE—Yep.

(*Boys sit down. Girls remain at the piano.*)

BOB—Gee! I wish I was in your place.

JOE—Don't I, though?

TOM—Not for me. The old farm's good enough for me, where I'm sure of three square meals per, and a good warm bed to sleep in.

GEORGE—Oh, you fellows make me tired. You talk as if nobody ever sleeps or eats only farmers. Wait till I make good and I'll show you how to sleep and eat and—

MR. W.—(*laughing*) You can already do that, I think.

BOB—You want to look out for these city sharpers, George.

JOE—And the bobbed-haired flappers and the vamps. (*George glances quickly at Hope and smiles.*)

GEORGE—I guess I'm old enough and big enough to hold my own with the sharpers, all right.

JOE—But how about the vamps?

JANE—He's been vamped, already; so maybe he's immune.

(*Hope claps her hand over Jane's mouth.*)

MRS. W.—Wouldn't you all like a little sweet cider and some doughnuts?

MR. W.—Sure they would—wouldn't you, folks?

TOM—Well, it wouldn't go bad, I guess, as far as I am concerned.

JANE—(as Mrs. W. rises.) Here, mother, Hope and I will go down and get it. You sit down.

MRS. W.—All right. Do you know where to find the doughnuts?

JANE—Yes—I found them already. (Jane and Hope go out R.)

JOE—What time does your train leave, George?

GEORGE—Nine-fifty-six. We'll have to leave here about nine o'clock.

TOM—Oh, we'll take you over in the flivver in ten minutes.

MR. W.—I was going to hitch up and drive him over. You can't always trust these flivvers to get you there on time.

TOM—You can trust this one. And it's all set rarin' to go.

MRS. W.—That's mighty good of you, I think—and that way, George won't have to leave so soon. (Surreptitiously wipes a tear with a corner of her apron.)

(Enter Hope and Jane with cider and doughnuts. The glasses of cider and the doughnuts are passed around. Mr. W. goes to drawer of desk or table and takes out box and counts out money and hands it to George.)

TOM—(as Mr. W. gives money to George) Gee! you must be anxious to get rid of him—paying him to go away.

GEORGE—Maybe he thinks it's good riddance.

MRS. W.—Now, George, you know better than that. Boys, pa was just buying the Jersey heifer from him.

MR. W.—Yes, paying for my own stock. Boys are

not like they used to be when I was young. We didn't claim half the stock from our fathers.

JOE—I'm glad I live in these days, then. I don't believe I'd care to stay on the farm and see nothing for my work.

HOPE—Tom, can't you play the piano?

GEORGE—Can he play? I'll say he can play.

JANE—Well, come on then, and sit down and play, won't you?

TOM—(*crossing over to the piano*) What do you want me to play?

HOPE—Can you play "L'Esprit Francais"?

TOM—(*perplexed*) Wha—what?

HOPE—I asked if you could play L'Esprit Francais.

TOM—Why, I can't even say it—let alone play it.

JANE—While Tom plays, George will sing.

MRS. W.—Yes, George, sing, won't you.

GEORGE—Oh, mother, I don't feel like singing to-night.

JOE—I see how it is. George is leaving home tonight, you know, taking the trail out into the cold, cruel world. Leaving his paternal domicile doesn't make him feel like singing, naturally. Then, George, if you'll just sing a little, it will make you feel better; then you won't mind leaving home. Consequently, of course, you won't mind singing. So let 'er go!

MR. W.—(*looking intently at Joe*) What was that?

TOM—Don't ask him. He couldn't say it the same way again, if he tried.

JOE—(*throwing out his chest*) That is what you call "logic." Before you ask me, I'll tell you what logic is, then you will understand. Logic is the science of the laws of thought, as thought; that is, to make it perfectly clear, of the necessary conditions to which thought, considered in itself, is subject.

BOB—It doesn't sound logical to me.

HOPE—Won't you sing, George—just once?

GEORGE—Oh, well, I suppose I'll have to.

TOM—Let's have "Old Black Joe"— (*or any other familiar melody*).

GEORGE—No, let's sing "The Old Oaken Bucket."

TOM—I can't play that new-fangled music.

GEORGE—Well, you play whatever you like, and I'll sing what I want to sing.

(If Tom can play one song and George sing another, the effect will be ludicrous.)

(As they sing, Mr. W. blows his nose frequently; Mrs. W. wipes an occasional tear with the corner of her apron; Hope gazes fondly at George, while he, in turn looks at her affectionately, during the song.)

BOB—*(after the song)* Now, George, when you get to the city, don't forget to write every day to your friends—especially one of your friends. *(Looks at Hope, who appears embarrassed.)*

TOM—And if you go and get chummy with some city girl, don't ever let her get the upper hand and take advantage of your lack of sophistication. Take a tip from yours truly, and start right.

GEORGE—A lot you know about governing the other sex. Why don't you get a girl and rule her—if you are so wonderfully wise, and all that?

TOM—That's the reason—because I'm wise. I know how to manage them, but I don't want to go to all the trouble and expense. I'll stay here on the farm and drive mules. Nevertheless, I can give you some good tips.

HOPE—Well, Tom, tell us some of the things you would do, should the occasion arise.

TOM—Well, the first thing a man should do is to assert himself right off the reel. Every woman admires a masterful man. You got to make her realize that she is only a Rib, while you are IT.

JOE—Cave man stuff. Treat 'em rough and tell 'em nothing.

TOM—No, not that, but plenty of intellect. Don't ever let her think she is the whole thing. Neglect her occasionally. When out in public, let her catch you casting occasional glances of admiration at other ladies. That'll make her appreciate your good taste and your broad mind.

MR. W.—(*drily*) Tom, I believe you had better stick to the mules. Your rules are a bachelor's rules, but any married man who adopts a code like that, will make a complete wreck of marriage.

JANE—(*interrupting*) I don't want to hurry you, boys; but if you are going to catch the train, you had better be moving.

GEORGE—(*glancing at his watch*) Yes, folks, I guess I'll have to be going. It'll soon be train time.

TOM—(*goes to Jane's side and talks to her*) Jane, if it's all the same to you, I believe I'll wait here for Bob and Joe to come back.

JANE—Surely—it doesn't make the slightest difference to me.

TOM—(*eagerly*) All right. (*Then wonderingly.*) You say it makes no difference to you—whether I go or stay?

JANE—(*nods her head in the affirmative.*)

TOM—Then I guess—. Don't you want me to stay, Jane ?

(*Jane walks across the stage to George.*)

HOPE—(*to Tom*) Of course, she wants you to stay, silly boy. With all your knowledge of femininity, can't you read a girl's mind enough to know that? But, Tommy, listen—don't try to put your theories into practice.

(*The boys prepare to leave. Mr. and Mrs. W. wipe more tears.*)

TOM—(*to Hope*) Oh, I can read 'em, all right—

but—well—Hope, you know—ah—you see Jane is different.

HOPE—(*laughing*) Oh, you boys! Yes, I know she is different—to you, at least. (*To Bob.*) Say, Bob, can't you take me in your flivver and drop me off at home?

GEORGE—Of course, he can. We'll be glad to have you. (*In lower tone.*) I will, anyway.

(*All but George and Hope go out center.*)

HOPE—Will you really be glad?

GEORGE—Really and truly. (*Takes her hand and talks earnestly.*) Say, Hope, you believe in me, don't you? Don't you think I'll make good?

HOPE—Why,—yes, I—of course, I believe in you, George. I always have.

GEORGE—And *you* don't think I'm crazy, and all that, because I want to leave the dull old farm and strike out for myself in the city, where the big things are?

HOPE—(*with a smile*) Well—it's not my place to dictate to you—not yet.

GEORGE—Why, Hope, little girl, I want you to dictate to me—always. I'd ask you to go with me now, only you see, I haven't anything to offer but myself.

HOPE—Don't you think that's a great deal for a man to offer? I do.

GEORGE—True—it is a great deal, maybe. But I'm not quite conceited enough to think for one minute that any sensible girl would take me—just for myself. Now, promise me, Hope, that you'll wait for me to make good. Will you?

HOPE—Yes—if you don't change your mind in the meantime.

GEORGE—I'll assure you there's no danger of my mind changing.

HOPE—(*smiling*) Now, George, you're just like all young men. You meet one girl and you think she is the

perfect one—the only one. Later you go out into the world, as you are doing now, and you meet another, and you decide *she* is the real and only one. And like Solomon of old, you go—on and on—experimenting and believing that *some* day you will really find her—maybe you will—(*coquettishly*) but I hope you don't.

GEORGE—Fear not. I'm settled as far as that is concerned. You promise?

HOPE—Yes, I promise—if you still think this way when you return.

GEORGE—(*taking her hand in both of his*) Hope, I'm happy. I'm so happy, I—

(*Loud voices outside. Bob, Tom, Joe, Mr. and Mrs. W. and Jane enter C.*)

JOE—For the love of Mike, George, do you want us to freeze to death?

BOB—We thought you were ready to go, and here you stand, talking to Hope. Isn't she going with us?

JANE—I guess he thinks this is his last "hope."

TOM—I think it is.

MR. W.—We don't want to rush you, son, but you know the train won't wait.

GEORGE—(*laughing happily*) Yes, yes, we're coming.

MRS. W.—Now, be sure and write as soon as you get there.

JANE—And send me a piece of sheet music once in a while.

HOPE—And think of us back here, occasionally.

BOB—Why drag in the "us"? You mean he should think of *you*; don't you?

HOPE—Well—I—

TOM—Don't you worry—he will.

JOE—Well, are you all ready? I'll go crank the machine. (*Exit C.*)

(George kisses Mrs. W., shakes hand with Mr. W., Tom and Jane.)

GEORGE—Well, good-bye, folks. I'll write—and I'll be home for Christmas.

(*Exeunt George, Hope and Bob. Mr. and Mrs. W., Jane and Tom are grouped at door C. Honk of auto is heard off stage and boys sing "Good-night Ladies," the song growing gradually fainter as though farther and farther away and finally out of hearing as curtain descends slowly.*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

(*Time—One week later than Act I.*)

(*Scene—Lobby of a cheap city hotel. Clerk's desk and door at left. As curtain rises lobby apparently is empty. Sound of loud snoring is heard. After a lapse of a few moments, enter Vivian Rinehart, C. She looks inquiringly around and finally looks over the top of the desk. She smiles and reaches over and pulls Alonzo's hair. He has been asleep behind the desk.*)

ALONZO—(loudly) Ouch! (*He jumps up and rubs his eyes.*) I'se gonna bust— Oh, I begs you' excuses, Miss — Miss Swinehart. I thought—

VIVIAN—Rinehart, not Swinehart.

ALONZO—Yes, Miss Rinehart. Does you desiah some service f'um de faculty of dis heah ho'-tel?

VIVIAN—I do.

ALON.—Which is what?

VIVIAN—I want a clean towel, a wash cloth, a cake of soap, some—

ALON.—Say, Miss Frihart, is you-all got a calendah up in yo' room?

VIVIAN.—A calendar?

ALON.—Yes'm a calendah. One o' dose inst-mints

which is got de numbahs o' de days in a month 'stributed all 'round ovah de outside ci'cumference.

VIVIAN—Yes, I have one—why?

ALON.—Well, you jes' go treat yo'se'f to a glimpse at it an' you all will observe dis am Chewsdays—not Sat-'day.

VIVIAN—What are you raving about? I know it's Tuesday.

ALON.—Well, f'um de way you was requestin', I got de idee you-all had de impression dis was a Sat'day.

VIVIAN—Tuesday or Saturday, get those things up to my room. (*Exit left.*)

ALON.—(*mumbling*) Talk about queer-actin' persons. Dese writin' people sho' is got de worl' beat. Towels! Wash rags! Soap! Nex' thing we know she'll be washin' her teef. (*Exit left.*)

(*Enter Glass, C. Walks to desk and raps on it.*)

(*Enter Alonzo L. Stands and looks at Glass.*)

GLASS—Well?

ALON.—Yes, sah, tol'able.

GLASS—You ought to be, if rest helps any.

ALON.—(*seriously*) It sho' does.

GLASS—Give me my key—and make it snappy.

ALON.—Which—de key?

GLASS—No, the—say, Lonzo, don't try to get funny with me. I'm not in the humor for jokes.

ALON.—Isn't de ponies runnin' de way you wants 'em to?

GLASS—I should say they didn't today. I lost every bet I made. There's something funny about the way I win and lose. For the last month I have been winning one day and losing the next. So I break just about even.

ALON.—Would you-all a'cept a siggestion f'um me?

GLASS—That depends. But let's have it.

ALON.—You says you wins one day an' loses de nex'?

GLASS—Yes.

ALON.—Well, why doesn't you-all jes' play 'em every othah day? Den you'll be ahead—'way ahead.

GLASS—(*disgusted*) You have a wonderful head on you, sonny.

ALON.—Tanks. (*Hands him key.*) Heah's yo' key.

GLASS—Have you seen our country boy lately?

ALON.—He lef' heah a few seconds ago. Ascended up to his room, I reckon.

GLASS—Does he hang around the lobby much?

ALON.—A good bit, sah.

GLASS—How does he act when he's alone?

ALON.—I don't know.

GLASS—Why don't you know?

ALON.—'Cause I ain't nevah been wid him when he's alone.

GLASS—Blockhead! If you—sh-h-h!—here he comes! Duck!

(*Alonzo disappears back of desk.*)

(*Enter George, looking downhearted.*)

GLASS—How do you do, Williams?

GEORGE—Howdy.

GLASS—Well, have you had any luck?

GEORGE—Not much. Nobody seems to want me very bad. They all take my name and address, and tell me they will call on me if they need help. I'm almost ready to hit the trail back to the old farm. (*Pause.*) But I hate it.

GLASS—I would think so. Well, Williams, I wish you were interested in my line of work. I could put you to work in a jiffy. We need men badly.

GEORGE—(*interested*) What kind of work is that?

GLASS—Detective work. But—of course, you wouldn't care for that sort of a job.

GEORGE—(*enthusiastically*) Wouldn't I? Just you give me a chance, and see if I wouldn't.

GLASS—(*seriously*) It is no snap. Lots of hard work—and—dangerous—sometimes.

GEORGE—Why, ever since I was big enough to read Nick Carter and Old Sleuth, I've wanted to be a detective, but I didn't suppose I'd ever have the chance. Tell me about it, Mr. Glass.

GLASS—Let's sit down. (*They sit on chairs at rear.*) The chief told me only this morning, that if I could find a good, steady, energetic young man, to put him on. We are getting so busy our force can't handle the work.

GEORGE—Really? I never knew you were a detective.

GLASS—Of course, as you can readily see, we are not permitted to advertise it. Why even Lonzo doesn't know—(*Walks to desk and peers over the top.*) He's asleep. Even Lonzo does not know what business I am in, and I have been putting up here for a year. (*Pulls vest open, displaying large star.*) See that? That little piece of silver makes the crooks open their eyes when I nab them. This is a captain's star.

GEORGE—(*enthusiastically*) Gee! What would I have to do to be a real detective?

GLASS—Well, you'd have to study awhile, in order to familiarize yourself with the laws most frequently broken. It's amazing, the number of people who break laws and get away with it. And that's why we need more men. I cleaned up twenty-four dollars yesterday. One fellow for smoking in the court house; one for throwing waste paper in the street; and one for spitting on the sidewalk. Got eight dollars apiece for the arrests. It's nothing to pick up thirty to forty dollars on a good day.

GEORGE—(*astonished*) Are all those things against the law?

GLASS—Yes—and I could tell you dozens of other things, too. This little book (*taking book from pocket*)

tells everything: tells you what to arrest them for, how to arrest them, how to place the charge, and everything a detective needs to know.

GEORGE—Could you let me use it?

GLASS—Why, sure, if you're really interested.

GEORGE—I certainly am.

GLASS—Of course, we require a deposit as a guarantee of good faith. Then, when you are through with the book you return it and get your money refunded. The badge is yours as long as you remain in the service.

GEORGE—(*anxiously*) What is required as a deposit, on the book?

GLASS—Eighty dollars is all.

GEORGE—(*whistling softly*) I guess that puts me out of the running.

GLASS—Why?

GEORGE—Well, I had only about a hundred dollars when I landed here, and my board and room and laundry has taken quite a bunch of it, not to mention a picture show, now and then. I have only about seventy dollars left.

GLASS—(*In deep study. Walks the floor a few moments.*) Williams, you look like an honest boy, and I'm willing to take a chance and depart from the regular procedure in this case, because I believe you are the man for the place. So I'll tell you what I'll do. If you want to try for the force, I'll give you a badge and let you have the Manual of Instructions. And we'll cut the deposit to sixty-five dollars. I'll have to give you a receipt for the full amount, eighty dollars, in order to have it look regular. Then, out of your first few rewards, you can hand me the other fifteen dollars. What do think of that?

GEORGE—(*after a moment's consideration*) I'll do it. (*Takes wallet from pocket and counts out money.*) Here's the money—sixty-five dollars.

GLASS—(*Writes receipt.*) Now, don't ever men-

tion to anybody that I let you in for less than eighty dollars. We are not supposed to do it. (*Hands George the book and pins a star on his coat, under the lapel.*) Here's success to you.

GEORGE—How can I ever repay you?

GLASS—(*magnanimously*) Don't mention it, young man; I'm only too glad to be able to help you a little.

GEORGE—I'll pay you the balance as soon as possible, Mr. Glass.

GLASS—That's all right, Williams. *Gentlemen* can trust each other.

(*Exit George, L.*)

GLASS—(*pacing floor*) Pretty soft. Guess I better change boarding houses, now. It might not be pleasant around here—when the rube comes to.

(*Enter Slippery Ike, C. He wears a false mustache.*)

IKE—(*looking cautiously around*) Hello, Glass.

GLASS—Howdy, Ike.

IKE—Any luck?

GLASS—A little. Enough to hold over for a few days until something bigger turns up. Know anything?

IKE—I've got a good prospect for tonight.

GLASS—Well, you can tell me about it later. I must go get my grip and get out of here before my latest victim gets wise to me. I'll be down in a jiffy. (*Exit L.*)

IKE—I wonder how much he got. (*Looks around the lobby.*) This would be an easy place to rob, but I don't think it would pay. (*Walks to desk and peers over the top. Sees Alonzo and draws back quickly. Takes a chair and picks up a newspaper to read.*)

(*Enter George, L., reading book.*)

GEORGE—Won't dad be surprised when I tell him of this? They used to make fun of me down home when I talked about being a detective. But I'll show them now, I guess. (*Spies Slippery Ike and gazes at him.*)

(Alonzo's head appears above desk. He rubs his eyes and yawns long and luxuriously, letting out a prolonged "Ah-h-h-h.")

IKE—(Throws paper on floor, rises and moves toward desk.) Give me a good cigar.

ALON.—Done sol' it.

IKE—What?

ALON.—Done sol' it.

IKE—Sold what?

ALON.—De see'-gar.

IKE—What cigar?

ALON.—De onliest one we had.

IKE—Well, of all the cheap joints! (Spits on floor.)

(George, who has not taken his eyes from Ike, now moves quickly to his side and slaps him on the shoulder.)

GEORGE—I'll trouble you to come with me, Mister.

IKE—Just what do you mean by that, sonny?

GEORGE—(showing star) I mean, you're arrested. I'm a detective.

IKE—(leering) Oh, you're a detective, are you? (Sizes George up, from head to foot.) Now, who told you that?

GEORGE—Never you mind who told me that. You come along with me.

IKE—If it's any of my business, what am I pinched for?

GEORGE—For spitting on the floor in a public place.

IKE—(laughing heartily) Run along, little boy, or I'll have the gentleman behind the counter toss you out. I'd do it myself, only I play so rough sometimes. (Tries to free himself, but George quickly secures a "hold" and after a short struggle, leads him out.)

ALON.—(showing head above desk, with a puzzled expression on his face.) What you know 'bout dat? I nevah 'simulated 'bout him being a detective. Gee! He

might ha' pinched me fo' snorin' in a hotel house. Guess I bettah watch out, f'um now on in de future.

(*Enter F. G. Black, C., carrying grip.*)

BLACK—(*walking to desk and looking around*) Well, where's the register?

ALON.—Done tuk it to de shop an' it ain't been re-tu'ned back yit.

BLACK—Took it to the shop?

ALON.—Yas suh—to de shop—de fixin' shop, where dey repairs up things.

BLACK—Took what to the shop?

ALON.—De cash registah. De boss say it was git-tin' to leak.

BLACK—I mean your hotel register—the book. I want to get a room.

ALON.—Well, you-all can have a room, I reckon—widout de necessity of a book.

BLACK—Have you one with a bath?

ALON.—Not today.

BLACK—What do you mean—not today?

ALON.—We only has got hot watah in de baff room on Sat'day. Dis is only Chewsdays.

BLACK—Well, give me a room, then—the best you have.

ALON.—(*reaching for key*) Numbah nineteen. Upstairs, two flights and turn to yo' right hand side.

(*Exit Black, L. passing Glass in doorway.*)

GLASS—(*looking around as if in search of someone*) Did you see anything of a young fellow in here, Lonzo?

ALON.—Which kind of a fellow?

GLASS—Tall and slender, with a black mustache.

ALON.—Yas-suh, I suttinly has.

GLASS—Where did he go?

ALON.—(*calmly*) To de jail house.

GLASS—(*excitedly*) To jail?

ALON.—(*polishing nails on coat sleeve*) Yas, suh—to de jail house.

GLASS—Who took him?

ALON.—A po'-lice.

GLASS—(*in consternation*) What was the charge?

ALON.—Spittin' on de floor.

GLASS—(*enlightened*) Oh, yes, a detective, you mean. Who was this detective? Did you know him?

ALON.—Sho' I knowed 'im. De young fellow from de country, which is stayin' heah at de ho'-tel.

(*Glass laughs heartily, and finally drops into chair, holding his sides.*)

GLASS—(*subsiding*) That's pretty good.

ALON.—What's dat?

GLASS—Oh, nothing.

ALON.—Oh, yes. (*Yawns.*)

GLASS—(*rising and coming to desk*) What's my bill, Lonzo? I've got to leave for Frisco tonight.

ALON.—(*counting on his fingers*) One, two, three, fo', five, six, seven, eight—eight times a dollah and a half is— (*Takes pencil from pocket and figures on paper*) —eight times one and a half equals twelve—that's right—twelve even dollars.

GLASS—(*counting out money*) Here you are. (*He hands Alonzo the money.*)

(*Enter Black, R. He sits down without speaking.*)

ALON.—Thanks, Mistah Glass. Come in again, if you is evah in town.

GLASS—Yes. (*Aside.*) I'll wait here a few minutes, until Ike gets back—but—maybe I better not, either. Oh, well, even if the hick is along, I can stall him off.

ALON.—(*to Black*) Hey, mistah, what's yo' name?

BLACK—F. G. Black.

ALON.—(*writing*) F. G. B-l-a-c-k—Black . What's yo' business, Mistah Black?

BLACK.—(*looking sharply at Alonzo for a moment*) None of yours.

ALON.—Huh?

BLACK.—(*with sarcasm*) I say, my business is my own business.

ALON.—Sho' it is.

BLACK.—(*rises and hands Alonzo a card*) Well, if you really want to know, I am representing the Black Star Oil Company. Wouldn't you like to invest a hundred dollars and clean up a thousand in a couple of weeks?

ALON.—(*enthusiastically*) Well I should say I suttinly would.

BLACK.—(*ready for action*) Well, suppose we talk business.

ALON.—Isn't no use.

BLACK.—Why not?

ALON.—I only got fifty cents. I'm married.

BLACK.—(*turning away*) Good-night!

(*Enter George, hurriedly, C. Looks around. Sees Glass and rushes toward him. Glass tries to get away, but George grabs and holds him.*)

GLASS—Let go. I'm in a big hurry—see you in a few minutes. (*He makes further ineffectual attempts to escape George.*)

GEORGE—But wait, until I tell you of the wonderful arrest I just made. I saw—

GLASS.—(*excitedly*) I tell you, I got to go.

GEORGE—Well, you can go, but I want to settle with you before you do.

GLASS.—Why, you can't prove anything on me. I gave you a book and a badge for your money, and—

GEORGE—Of course you did, and that's what I want

to settle for. I still owe you fifteen dollars, and (*He reaches in his pocket, taking out bills, and hands the money to Glass.*) —here it is.

GLASS—(*puzzled*) But—I thought—

GEORGE—I arrested a fellow here in the lobby a few minutes ago for spitting on the floor, and took him down to the police station. Just as I got him inside, he tried to duck away from me and in catching him I pulled off his false mustache. Right away the Captain recognized him as Slippery Ike, for whom a reward of twelve hundred dollars was offered. They want him over in Pennsylvania for cracking safes. The Captain gave me two hundred in cash and a check for a thousand dollars. So how can I ever thank you, Mr. Glass, for starting me in the business?

GLASS—Don't bother thanking me—let me go.

GEORGE—Just a minute. The captain told me this Slippery Ike has a pal and if I can land him I can get another thousand. He's going to get me a picture of him this afternoon.

(*Glass is thoroughly frightened, and jerks away, almost falling to the floor as George releases him, then rushes out C.*)

GEORGE—Gee! He acts queer. I wonder why he was in such a hurry to get away. Oh, I suppose he's working on a big case some place. (*Sticks thumbs in vest, throws out his chest and struts around the stage.*) Going some!

BLACK—(*walks over to George*) Young man, I want to congratulate you on your good work. My name is F. G. Black, of the Black Star Oil Company. (*Shakes hands with George.*)

GEORGE—My name is George Williams, detective.

BLACK—Well, that's a mighty fine business for a young man, and there's lots of money in it, too, it seems.

GEORGE—Well, it seems to be paying pretty well, so far.

BLACK—How long have you been at it?

GEORGE—I just started today.

BLACK—Fine! Do you invest your money?

GEORGE—Well—not yet. I haven't had time to think about that.

BLACK—Possibly you will not do quite this well every day, so you ought to be very careful how you invest this money. Why a thousand dollars, if invested judiciously, would put you on easy street for the rest of your life. I have in mind a poor old woman who took in washings for a living, owned a little cottage and a cow. She had saved up a hundred dollars from years of hard work. She was persuaded to sell her house and invest her money in Black Star stock, and now she doesn't have to wash and she lives in a large brick residence.

GEORGE—And doesn't wash any more?

BLACK—No, sir. (*Aside.*) She's in the poor house, scrubbing floors.

GEORGE—What kind of stock is this Black Star?

BLACK—The only stock paying five hundred per cent dividends; the stock that is making millionaires hourly. It is indeed regrettable that there is so little of it left. If we had a million shares we could sell it without half trying. But as it is we have only one hundred shares left.

GEORGE—(*interested*) How much does a share cost?

BLACK—Ten dollars.

GEORGE—Well, I wouldn't mind taking a chance on about—

BLACK—About what?

GEORGE—On—maybe one share.

BLACK—(*smiling*) I wish I could sell you one share but you'd be so sore at yourself—and me—inside of a week, that you'd want to shoot me and drown yourself for not buying all you could get. Even a ten-dollar share would pay you a dividend of fifty dollars a year—probably more. But I am waiting to see a customer who

wants one hundred shares. Of course, this man has quite a block of our stock already, and if you cared to invest in the stock, I could explain the circumstances to him. I'd like to see the stock go to some young fellow like you. Wouldn't a five thousand dollar income seem pretty nice to you?

GEORGE—I'll say it would. I wouldn't mind living on the farm with an income like that.

BLACK—Well, I'm glad I met you. I guess I'll be going now. (*Hesitates.*) You don't think you'd like to—

GEORGE—Well, if you'll wait till I get this check cashed, I might—

BLACK—Don't let that bother you. You can endorse it and I'll attend to the rest.

GEORGE—(*hesitating*) You're sure there is no possible chance of losing on this proposition?

BLACK—I give you my word of honor.

GEORGE—Well, I'll do it. Where's the stock?

BLACK—(*looks at check and puts it in his pocket*)

GEORGE—(*looking at certificates*) Nice paper and a good job of printing. I worked in a printing shop for over a month.

BLACK—I don't want to hurry you, but I have quite a lot of business to attend to, so if you will sign—

GEORGE—Sure. (*Endorses check and hands it to Black.*)

BLACK—(*Looks at check and puts it in his pocket.*) Thank you. —Oh, yes, one more little detail. There is a slight charge for registration of the stock, etc., in order to make you absolutely safe. I had almost forgotten that.

GEORGE—How much is that?

BLACK—Only one dollar per share. One hundred shares for you—amounting to just one hundred dollars.

GEORGE—(*slowly counting out the money*) Pretty steep.

BLACK—(*pocketing the money and handing the certificates to George*) But just think.

(*They shake hands.*)

BLACK—(*moving toward door L.*) Good-bye, and success to you.

GEORGE—Good-bye, and thank you.

BLACK—You're *entirely* welcome. (*Exit L.*)

(*Loud snore is heard. After a few moments, Alonzo's head appears above desk. He yawns.*)

ALON.—Does my sleepin' bother you-all, Mistah?

GEORGE—Does it bother me? What do you mean?

ALON.—Dey say I's a awful loud sleeper. I scare my own self sometimes. Jes' now woke up myself wid a big one.

(*Enter Vivian L.*)

VIVIAN—Alonzo, is there any mail for me?

ALON.—(*looking through pile of letters*) No'm, dey is not.

VIVIAN—That's queer. Well, if a letter should come, will you please send it up immediately?

ALON.—Yes'm.

(*Exit Vivian, L.*)

GEO—(*approaching desk*) Who is the lady, Lonzo?

ALON.—Dat's Miss Kindhart.

GEORGE—Miss who?

ALON.—Miss—No, dat aren't it. It's—it's—oh,—yes—Miss Rinehart. Miss Vivian Rinehart.

GEORGE—Does she stay here?

ALON.—She suttinly do. She cain't git away.

GEORGE—Why not?

ALON.—Us has got her trunks garnished.

GEORGE—You mean garnisheed?

ALON.—Same thing—on'y I nevah was strong on de French pronounciation.

GEORGE—But why have you attached her trunks?

ALON.—She owes us.

GEORGE—What is her business?

ALON.—She claims to write stuff—stories and novels, and all dat kind o' stuff. But she is de mysteriourest female lady I evah seen.

GEORGE—Oh, is she an authoress?

ALON.—I don' know whether she is a —a—dat thing which you jes' called her— or not. But she writes stuff.

GEORGE—Does she sell it?

ALON.—I don't reckon she do. An' no wondah!

GEORGE—Why?

ALON.—Can you-all keep a secret?

GEORGE—Certainly,

ALON.—Well, she writes tons of stuff and sends it off to de newspapers and editors—but it all comes back.

GEORGE—But why?

ALON.—She's tryin' to cheat, but she cain't git by.

GEORGE—Cheat? How?

ALON.—Jes' cause dese stories she writes up is not real. She goes and makes 'em up outen her own mind. Dat's why so.

GEORGE—(*laughs*) How long has she been here?

ALON.—(*scratching his head*) Le's see. She arrove heah on de day I got a haircut and baff. She's been heah jes' one day less'n three weeks now.

GEORGE—Well—I think I'll go to my room and read awhile. Is there any mail for me?

ALON.—Uh huh. They's a postal card f'um yo' sistah. (*Hands George card.*)

(*Enter Vivian, L. Sits near rear of stage and begins to read.*)

(*Enter policeman, C. Approaches desk.*)

POLICEMAN—Is there a man here registered under the name of Black? F. G. Black?

(*Vivian and George show interest.*)

ALON.—Yes suh, dey is.

POLICEMAN—Can you tell me where I can find him?

ALON.—Room nineteen. Two flights up and turn to yo' right han' side.

POLICEMAN—May I go up?

ALON.—Yes, suh.

(*Exit Policeman, L.*)

GEORGE—What do you suppose he wants with him?
(*Takes papers from his pocket and examines them anxiously.*)

ALON.—Mebby he's a murderer, or a kidnaper, or a bootlegger, or sumpin' of de sort or other.

VIVIAN—Or a gold brick man, or an oil salesman, or a forger—

GEORGE—(*excitedly*) Oil salesman—that's what he is.

VIVIAN—Are you sure?

GEORGE—Positive.

VIVIAN—What company?

GEORGE—The Black Star.

VIVIAN—(*smiles knowingly*) Well, well—that is fine.

GEORGE—Don't think me rude or inquisitive, but would you mind telling me just what you mean?

VIVIAN—Well, young fellow, steer clear of him. He looks like a smooth one—and these cheap hotels are their most prolific fields for suckers.

GEORGE—(*excitedly*) Why, I bought—

VIVIAN—You bought some of the stock?

GEORGE—(*desperately*) Yes.

VIVIAN—Not much, I hope.

GEORGE—A thousand dollars worth.

VIVIAN—Great heavens! Well, you're lucky that officer came in before the crook got out—lucky indeed. You are from the country, aren't you?

GEORGE—Yes. Do I show it so plain?

VIVIAN—I'm from the country, myself, and it's not so hard to recognize my kind—while they're still fresh.

GEORGE—Fresh is right, although "green" might be a better adjective in my case.

VIVIAN—Oh, you'll be all right after a while. But you'll have to be careful. You mustn't trust any strangers.

GEORGE—But you're a stranger, and you look trustworthy.

VIVIAN—Well—don't trust strangers.

GEORGE—But why shouldn't I trust you?

VIVIAN—Because, if I had a real good opportunity, I might swindle you worse than this oil man has tried to do.

GEORGE—Why—I don't get you?

VIVIAN—Well—be on your guard—I'm willing to take a chance at marriage, if I should find the ideal man.

GEORGE—(*showing interest*) What is your ideal of a man?

VIVIAN—A peaceable, easy-going fellow, surrounded by money and a six cylinder car.

GEORGE—That being the case, I can drop my guard. But, aren't you afraid a husband would interfere with your work?

VIVIAN—My work? No, not yet.

GEORGE—What do you mean?

VIVIAN—Well—work is something I am going to do—some day—but I think I will struggle against it a little longer.

(*Enter Policeman, L.*)

POLICEMAN—He's gone.

GEORGE—Who's gone?

POLICEMAN—Black.

(George is stupefied. Vivian wrinkles her brow in thought. Alonzo smiles broadly.)

ALON.—Dat's lucky.

GEORGE—Lucky?

ALON.—Yes suh. He ain't et any meals offen dis ho'-tel.

GEORGE—How did he get out?

POLICEMAN—Through a window. I hope he didn't sting anybody here.

GEORGE—(sadly) He got me. Isn't the stock any good?

POLICEMAN—I should say not. The entire property of the company consists of four acres of land with one drill on it. But they have cleaned up about a hundred thousand on it.

GEORGE—(despairingly) And Christmas only a few weeks away. I wonder if I'll have carfare home.

VIVIAN—Officer, where is this oil land?

POLICEMAN—In Wichita county, Texas.

VIVIAN—Do you suppose I could get a list of the victims?

POLICEMAN—Sure—at headquarters, Miss.

VIVIAN—Thank you.

(Officer touches finger to cap.)

GEORGE—May I ask why you want this list, Miss Rinehart?

VIVIAN—Well, you see, I may be able to find some color for a story I am writing.

GEORGE—(skeptically) Oh—I see.

(Exit Vivian L. Exit Policeman C.)

ALON.—Mistah Gawge, dis little anecdote what jes' transpired will sort-o' put a kink in yo' anticipations, won't it not?

GEORGE—What do you mean?

ALON.—I unde'stood you-all was about to contract matrimony wid some female lady.

GEORGE—Well—yes, I do intend marrying, as soon as I'm able to support a wife.

ALON.—You-all bettah watch yo' footsteps, I reckon.

GEORGE—Watch my step?

ALON.—Yes, sah.

GEORGE—Why?

ALON.—I has a idee Miss Vivian Blindhart has got de'-signs on yo' future.

GEORGE—Don't lose any sleep over that idea. Miss Rinehart is an estimable young lady; but she is not exactly the type I would choose for my wife. She is one of these self-sufficient girls—a law unto herself, as it were. But the girl I marry is going to be a sweet-tempered little woman—the kind that clings to a man lovingly all down the pathway of life.

ALON.—(*smiling broadly*) Yas, suh! Jes' de same kind as de one which tuk ovah my name an' liberty—a clingin' vine. She sho do cling, too. She kin cling to a argumint or a two-bit piece, longes' of any woman I evah seen. Clingin' is de fondest thing she is of. Don't enlighten my unde'standin' 'bout dese clingin'-vine women folks. I is got a reg'lar clinger.

(*Enter Vivian, L.*)

VIVIAN—Well, Mr.—, why, I don't even know your name.

GEORGE—Williams—George Williams.

VIVIAN—(*studying*) Williams—George Williams, did you say?

GEORGE—Yes—George Williams, of Salem.

VIVIAN—Of Salem?

GEORGE—Yes.

VIVIAN—(*smiling knowingly*) It strikes me I have heard of you before.

GEORGE—Possibly you have, although I can't recall

anything I have ever done that would put me in the public eye—outside of proving myself the prize sucker of the state.

VIVIAN—Perhaps you haven't been.

GEORGE—I certainly have.

VIVIAN—In a few weeks you may change your mind.

GEORGE—In a few weeks—let's see—Christmas will be here, and I'll be home—the return of the prodigal son.

VIVIAN—Don't lose HOPE.

GEORGE—(*quickly*) What do you—oh, I guess I've already lost Hope.

VIVIAN—You mustn't.

GEORGE—You don't understand just what I mean.

VIVIAN—(*smiling*) Probably I know more than you think.

GEORGE—(*To Alonzo, who has dropped to sleep*) Alonzo, figure up my bill. I am going to change my quarters. Too many crooks around here to suit me.

ALON.—(*startled, rubbing his eyes*) Yas, suh—yas, suh. Is you-all leavin' dis hos'elry?

GEORGE—Yes—and get a move on. And, Miss Rinehart, I want to thank you for the way you have tried to encourage me, today.

VIVIAN—Don't mention it. It was a pleasure. (*Offers her hand.*)

GEORGE—Good-bye. And if you ever get up Salem way, look up my folks.

VIVIAN—(*Looks him straight in the eye and smiles*) Well, I HOPE I will. (*Exit hurriedly, L.*)

(*George stands dumbfounded as curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III.

(*Time—Christmas Eve.*)

(*Scene—Same as Act I.*)

(*Discovered—Mr. Williams, sitting dejectedly in rocker, head hanging. Mrs. W. seated near, darning stockings. Silence for a few moments after rise of curtain.*)

MR. W.—Alice, what have we ever done that we should have all this trouble? Here it is Christmas Eve, and not a bit of money for presents. We haven't had a word from George for several weeks, and no telling what has happened to him. The interest on the mortgage is due in three days without a chance of paying it off.

MRS. W.—Lawrence, you mustn't always be looking at the dark side of things. The silver lining is still there, just as it has been in the past. No matter how dark the day, you may be sure the sun shines on the other side of the clouds.

MR. W.—(*whittling a match into a toothpick*) Maybe so, but if the blamed clouds are so thick it can't shine through, we've got to light the lamps, just the same. And that's hard to do when you're out of oil. I know there's plenty of money in the world, but it ain't doing us any good just now, is it?

MRS. W.—Well, we've got three days yet, and while there's life there's hope. Something may turn up. (*Jane is heard singing as she approaches.*) Don't let Jane know.

MR. W.—She'll find out soon enough, I guess.

(*Enter Jane, R.*)

JANE—What are you all looking so sad about? Don't you know this is Christmas Eve? You must act happy.

(*Mr. W. hangs his head and chews toothpick.*)

(*Jane looks at her father in wonder.*)

MRS. W.—Your father doesn't feel well, Jane.

JANE—(*goes to his side and puts arm around his*

shoulder) Where do you feel bad, Daddykins? Want me to fix a mustard plaster for you?

MR. W.—No, Jane, don't bother. I guess I'm just tired. Feel kind of stuffy.

JANE—(*going to chair*) Wouldn't it be dandy, if George would come walking in and surprise us? But it wouldn't really surprise me, for I've a feeling he's going to get here tonight. You know, he said he'd see us at Christmas time.

MRS. W.—Maybe he will. I just heard the train a few minutes ago.

JANE—(*jumping up*) I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to light a candle and put it in the window for him. Won't it tickle him to see it from the road?

MR. W.—Don't build your hopes too high, Jane.

(*Jane goes out R., returning shortly with a candle, which she lights and puts in window. If no window is available, she may walk off stage and return without the candle.*)

JANE—Now, I must go and see how my candy is coming. George always loved homemade candy. Mother, aren't you anxious to see him?

MRS. W.—(*wiping a tear*) Yes, Jane, I am.

JANE—Hope is coming over tonight. We will exchange presents when she gets here.

(*Exit Jane, R.*)

MR. W.—I hope she doesn't bring us anything.

MRS. W.—Why not?

MR. W.—Because we can't give her anything in return.

MRS. W.—Hope isn't the kind of girl that gives a present in order to get one in return. She gives because it makes her happy.

(*Noise of stamping feet off stage.*)

(*Jane enters R. and hurries to door C.*)

(*Enter Hope.*)

HOPE—Gracious, how it's snowing! Good evening, everybody! Merry Christmas!

(All return her greeting.)

JANE—Give me your coat, Hope.

HOPE—Wait. There is something under it. *(Takes package from under her coat and places on table. Removes coat and Jane hangs it up.)*

MRS. W.—Hope, have you heard from George lately?

HOPE—Not for ages. But I am sure he intends coming home for Christmas. His letter was full of good cheer, and he seemed to be doing fine, but he never mentioned what he was doing.

JANE—Well, I am making some of his favorite candy, and I've put a candle in the window. Seems like he ought to be getting here pretty soon. By the way, Hope, I have a little package for you. *(Steps out door R., returning with Christmas package.)* Here it is. It isn't much, but you will know we thought of you. *(Hands it to Hope.)*

HOPE—Oh, thanks, ever so much. And—*(picks up her package)*—here's one for all of you. *(Opens package and hands Christmas boxes to Mr. and Mrs. W. and Jane.)* I made them all myself.

(All proceed to open packages, taking out presents and admiring them.)

(Faintly, as though from a distance, comes the sound of male voices singing some old, familiar song, such as "Jingle Bells," "Sweet Adaline," "Old Kentucky Home," etc.)

JANE—Listen!

(Attitude of listening by all. Singing comes nearer. Honk of an auto is heard outside, then boys' voices.)

MRS. W.—I wonder if it's George.

MR. W.—I doubt it. I suppose it's Joe and Tom and Bob, stopping on the way to town.

HOPE—*(excited)* I believe I heard George's voice—really, I do.

JANE—I'll bet a dime he's there. (*Jumps up and down, then runs to door and calls*) Hello!

GEORGE—(*outside*) Hello, Sis! How are you all?

JANE—It's George! (*Runs out.*)

(*Mr. and Mrs. W. and Hope go to door, and shortly George, Tom, Bob, Joe and Jane enter C.*)

(*George embraces Mrs. W., shakes hands with Mr. W. He then goes to Hope and takes both of her hands in his. The newcomers are boisterously greeting everybody else and George's words to Hope and her replies are unheard.*)

HOPE—(*after quiet is restored*) We're mighty glad to see you again, George.

GEORGE—And, believe me, I'm glad to be back. I never before realized this old place was so beautiful. It was worth walking a week to see.

MRS. W.—How long are you going to stay with us, George?

GEORGE—Till you chase me out, mother.

MR. W.—What? I thought you liked the city so well.

GEORGE—I did. But some way, I don't seem to fit in. The folks there are so different. And I never was any happier than when I packed my grip and hit the trail back home—to the real folks.

TOM—See any pretty girls, George?

GEORGE—(*looking at Hope*) Not a one that could hold a candle to some of the girls back here.

BOB—For instance—Hope?

(*Embarrassed smiles from George and Hope.*)

JANE—George, in one of your letters, you said you had found a fine job, just what you had always wanted to do, and that was the last we ever heard about it. What was it?

GEORGE—(*uneasily*) Sis, if it's all the same to you, we'll talk about something else.

MRS. W.—(*anxiously*) Why, George, you haven't done anything to be ashamed of, have you?

GEORGE—Not in the way you mean, mother, but I'm rather ashamed of myself, at that.

MRS. W.—Please tell us, George. It worries me.

GEORGE—It worries me, too.

HOPE—You might feel better, George.

GEORGE—Well, it won't take long to tell it, and I suppose it might as well be out of my system.

BOB—Sure—might as well.

GEORGE—Well, after I landed, I started out over the city to see what large, growing firm would bid the highest for my services. I was going to be kind but firm, and not accept any ordinary position. After the first day, I decided I *might* be satisfied with a position as assistant superintendent; at the end of the second day, I would have been satisfied with a secretaryship and when three days had gone by I found myself envying the impudent office boys.

MR. W.—Didn't I tell you?

GEORGE—Yes, father, you told me.

JANE—Go on.

GEORGE—Then, at the hotel, I met a fellow named Glass, and he got to talking about the detective business. He pretended to be a captain of detectives, and said he needed more men. Well, I've always wanted to be a detective, so I was right after him for a job. He said I would have to pay a fee of eighty dollars to join the force. I had only about \$65 and he took that, which left me owing him fifteen dollars.

MR. W.—Didn't I tell you? I thought some slicker would get you.

GEORGE—Well, he got me.

MRS. W.—Poor boy!

GEORGE—But in less than an hour I arrested a man.

JOE—What for?

GEORGE—For spitting on the floor.

TOM—(*laughing*) For spitting on the floor? Arrested a man for spitting on the floor?

GEORGE—Sure, I did.

MR. W.—Well, of all the —

GEORGE—Well, for that eighty dollars, Glass gave me a book which told of the many little things you could pinch a man for doing, like spitting on the floor, and so forth, so I got this fellow.

JANE—Well, George!

GEORGE—Well, I took him around to headquarters, and when he tried to give me the slip, I grabbed him and pulled his mustache off.

MRS. W.—Oh, George!

GEORGE—Yes—you see, it was a false one.

HOPE—Oh! How exciting!

GEORGE—Then the chief of police recognized him as a crook wanted for safe-blowing, and for whom there was a reward of twelve hundred dollars offered.

MR. W.—And you got it, George? You got twelve hundred dollars?

GEORGE—Yes. Two hundred cash and a check for a thousand.

MR. W.—(*rising and walking over to George and slapping him on the shoulder*) Mother, I always did have a sneaking idea that George had it in him to be a detective.

MRS. W.—Well, I always told you he would make a success of anything he liked.

MR. W.—George, may I have a word with you?

GEORGE—Sure.

(*Mr. W. leads him down stage to right front and talks to him, while the others talk in low tones, occasionally pointing to George and his father.*)

MR. W.—You know we are pretty hard up right now, George?

GEORGE—No, I didn't know it, father.

MR. W.—Well, we are; lost a dozen pigs and corn dropped away down in price; and old Spencer is pushing us for the mortgage money, threatening to foreclose.

GEORGE—He is? (*angrily*) The old miser.

MR. W.—Yes.

GEORGE—Aren't you able to pay it?

MR. W.—I don't see how. I had been figuring on getting a little help from you, when you got home.

GEORGE—(*dejectedly*) I wish I could, father, but just now, I'm decidedly broke.

MR. W.—Why—didn't you get twelve hundred dollars for your crook?

GEORGE—Yes.

MR. W.—You surely haven't spent it all!

GEORGE—I lost it.

MR. W.—Lost it!

GEORGE—Yes. Invested it in some oil stock, and got beautifully stung.

MR. W.—(*exasperated*) Well, of all the dumb—. (*To the others.*) What do you know about that? This foolish boy has gone and lost his twelve hundred dollars in some fake oil stock. Mother, what have I been saying all along? Didn't I say it would be queer if the city sharpers didn't get him? Didn't I, mother?

GEORGE—(*forlornly*) I guess you were right, dad.

JANE—You've had some experience, anyway, haven't you, George?

GEORGE—(*looking at Hope as he answers*) Plenty of it.

HOPE—Are you going back, George?

GEORGE—Not on your life! I've had enough. After I was stung, I left that hotel, found another almost as bad and washed dishes in a restaurant until day before yesterday. I felt rather safe there, and I was sure of something to eat—such as it was.

JOE—Well, let's cheer this crowd up a little. Here it is Christmas Eve, and it looks like a funeral around here. Let's have a little song. Hope, you play the piano and Mr. George Williams will sing that beautiful ballad entitled, "My money's gone over the ocean, my money's gone over the sea. My money lies over the ocean; oh, bring back my money to me." (*Sings.*) "Bri-i-ing ba-ack, bring back—"

BOB—(*going toward Joe*) Help me choke him, George.

TOM—Well, suppose we do sing.

JANE—All right. Come on. What shall it be?

(*The young people gather around the piano and sing some familiar song. In the midst of the singing, Otis Spencer enters, and music stops.*)

MRS. W.—(*rising and offering a chair*) Why, good evening, Mr. Spencer. I never heard you knock.

SPENCER—No wonder—with all this racket.

GEORGE—(*coming forward*) Howdy, Mr. Spencer.

SPENCER—(*gruffly*) Howdy. Had to come home, I see.

GEORGE—Sure. I couldn't stay away over Christmas.

SPENCER—(*to Mr. W.*) You seem to be having a pretty good time for folks as hard up as you claim to be.

MRS. W.—There ain't anything to be gained by worrying.

(*George and Hope stand near piano, earnestly engaged in conversation.*)

SPENCER—What about the mortgage Williams?

MR. W.—Listen here, Spencer, that money is not due until the twenty-seventh, and when it is due, I'll have it for you—or get out.

SPENCER—Don't get so huffy about it. I was going by and just stopped in for a minute. But, you listen to me and don't fly too high. On the twenty-seventh you have the money ready, or you *will* get out.

GEORGE—(*who has heard the last remark*) Say, you old money-grubber, you get out, right now. (*Goes toward Spencer, threateningly.*)

MRS. W.—George, George!

SPENCER—Don't get too smart, young fellow. You'll more'n likely be pleadin' with me afore this week's up—and a lot o' good it'll do you, too.

GEORGE—(*Rushes toward Spencer, but Hope catches his arm*) You better go while you can or you won't be able to come after your old money.

SPENCER—(*leering*) Better hold your tongue, or you might spend your Christmas in the lock-up.

HOPE—Don't pay any attention to him, George. It only makes matters worse.

(*Telephone rings and Jane answers.*)

JANE—Hello. * * Yes, this is Jane Williams.
* * Oh, you say you have a message? * * For George Williams? * * Yes, he's right here. I'll call him. (*To George.*) Long distance calling you, (*George goes to phone and takes receiver.*)

GEORGE—Hello. * * George Williams speaking.
* * Miss Rinehart?

MR. W.—(*to the others*) I'll bet he's in more trouble. Like enough some chorus girl after him for a breach of promises.

GEORGE—(*at phone*) You don't mean it! * * WHAT! * * Honest? * * Oh, boy!—I mean Oh, goody! * * Do I what? * * Yes, I liked the work, but I believe the farm is the best place, after all * * (*Listens for several moments.*) Thank you ever so much. * * Sure, we'd be delighted to have you. * * Good-bye. (*Hangs up.*)

(*He begins dancing around the room and grabs the boys by the shoulders, pats Jane on the cheek, hugs his mother, and Hope, dances with his dad, and pushes old Spencer in the chest, causing him to sit heavily in the chair behind him.*)

JOE—Better phone for the dog wagon.

GEORGE—(*dancing around the room, singing*) "My money's come back o'er the ocean; my money's come back o'er the sea. My money's come back o'er the ocean, My money sure looks good to me. —Ta—da-a-a, Ta—da-a-a. Ta—"

MRS. W.—George, please tell us what it's all about.

SPENCER—He's crazy.

GEORGE—Of course I'm crazy. Send me to the lock-up.

JANE—Sit down.

GEORGE—(*sits*) It was from Vivian Rinehart. She says she knows you, Hope.

HOPE—Vivian Rinehart! I should say I do know her. We went to school together, and after she left school, she got into the secret service. But what is the matter?

GEORGE—(*starts to get up, but Tom and Bob push him back into the chair*) Oil, oil, oil! That's what's the matter.

MR. W.—Oil? What oil?

GEORGE—My oil. My thousand dollars worth of oil stock.

HOPE—What about it, George? Tell us.

GEORGE—(*growing calmer*) It's not a long story—but, believe me, it's a pippin. (*All listen attentively.*) At the hotel where I was staying, there was a girl, this Miss Rinehart. She gave out the impression that she was an authoress, looking for material for stories. When Black, the oil man, disappeared, and it looked as if I had been stung, she began to get busy and last week, as I was getting ready to leave and feeling so downhearted, she tried to cheer me up, but I never dreamed she was a detective. She told me that maybe I would come out all right. Now, I learn she has been on the trail of these swindlers.

MR. W.—But what good will it do you, if they have your money?



GEORGE—Well she and Uncle Sam are making the crooks use the money. They started an investigation, sent an oil expert down to Texas and he said there was oil there if they would only get after it. The authorities put men to work and after digging a while they struck a whopper of a gusher, then another—and another. Dividends will be four hundred per cent, so my income right this minute is around four thousand dollars per annum. If they keep on working, I'll likely pull down five or six thousand. They have mailed me by special delivery, a check for a thousand dollars just to sort of pull me over Christmas.

JOE—Ain't business grand?

JANE—(*breathlessly*) Then you are rich, George?

GEORGE—If somebody doesn't wake me up, I am.

HOPE—I'm glad for you, George.

MR. W.—I kinda thought something like this would happen.

GEORGE—(*suddenly observing Spencer*) Are you still here? (*To Mr. W.*) How much do you owe this gentleman, father?

MR. W.—Four hundred dollars and seventy-eight cents.

GEORGE—Tell him he will get his money on the day it is due. —And ask him to shut the door—as he goes out.

(*Mrs. W. shows Spencer to door C. and closes it.*)

MR. W.—(*rubbing his hands and patting George on the back*) I knew you'd come out all right in the end.

GEORGE—(*Goes to Hope, takes both hands in his, and they walk to the front of the stage, while the others laugh and point at them*) Hope, little girl, what color do you want the shingles on our new bungalow out there at the edge of the woods—red or green? (*Puts his arm about her and draws her closer.*)

HOPE—(*looking up happily*) I like BROWN.

(*As curtain falls, they kiss—almost.*)

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